1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

Everything that can be digested is eaten, but nothing is done with bone or shell. When the Malays were trading with the natives the shell was exchanged for Malay products.

A man who goes turtle harpooning usually takes three or four men with him to paddle the canoe. He is considered the leader, but helps with the paddling while looking for turtle. The canoe goes beyond the breakwater out into the open sea. Along the sand beaches a goodly number of these animals can be found swimming in to shore to lay their eggs. When the head of the turtle is sighted all the oarsmen paddle as rapidly and silently as possible. They hold their heads and bodies down as low as possible so as not to be seen. When the canoe gets within range the harpooner articulates his harpoon to his spear-thrower and aims it just back of the turtle's head. If he strikes, the turtle dives, taking the head of the harpoon with the rope following to the sea bottom. The rope is held on to if it is possible; if not, it is picked up again when the animal rises sufficiently to bring the rope within reach. When the turtle comes up for air he is sometimes speared again, once more goes down, and the rope again held. When the rope becomes slack and it is felt that the turtle has tired itself, a man jumps overboard, puts his hands at the side of the turtle and attempts to turn it on its back. When he has it in this position the other men pull up on the rope. They catch hold of the turtle's legs and pull it on board. It is then hit on the head with a club. This has to be done carefully because a bite in a vulnerable spot would probably result in death.

Eggs of three species of turtle are eaten. Buckingham and Arnhem Bays are supposed to furnish the largest supply. Nests of crocodiles are sought out along the swampy river banks and their eggs gathered and eaten.

Sharks and crocodiles are harpooned, but usually speared. The backbone of a crocodile is chopped in back of the hind legs to sever the tail and to prevent its striking the hunter. When a sting ray is speared its tail is held in the mouth to prevent the fish's barbed prong from striking the spearsman while he is killing it.

The shallow rock bottoms along the seacoast or the white sand bottoms of the long low beaches where the water is knee to waist deep are the favorite fishing places. A spear-thrower is nearly always used with a fish spear.

Poison is sometimes used to stupefy fish, which then float in the water until gathered in. Dangi, an unidentified vegetable product, is

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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how to make it. There was no arduous labor attached to collecting turtle shell to trade for an axe, for the shell came as a by-product to the pursuit of harpooning turtles. The making of the stone axe took time and a considerable amount of hard labor; but to go turtle hunting was a pleasure, since turtle harpooning expeditions are not only for the anticipated enjoyment of the flesh and to supply the family larder, but also for the pure joy of stalking the turtle, spearing it, and bringing it home to an admiring audience which could appreciate one's abilities as a hunter and a man of importance. Undoubtedly pride of workmanship is felt by a native axe-maker. His fellow tribesmen always express their appreciation of a well-turned-out axe or spear head, but the social approbation given to the two occupations is completely disproportionate.

The turtle shell had never been used, and had been discarded until the Malay came; that it should become an article of high value to the trader was an item of some amusement and a fortuitous circumstance for the aborigines. Since the women gather oysters, the trading of pearls for the Malay objects of trade was looked upon by the black as an even greater bit of luck than the trading of shell.

The trepang (*beche-de-mer*) industry demanded more effort. In this activity the Malay showed himself a practical sociologist, for he again made no vain attempt to change Murngin civilization to his liking, but merely used the institutions he found among them to satisfy his wants.

Canoes were given to certain men who, with their clansmen, gathered the sea slugs from the low-lying sand banks at low tide. All this the native understood, since it was but one added particular to a general type of behavior; and although the blacks do not eat trepang, this animal belongs to a group of seashore fauna which are gathered and eaten, and could have been added to the diet without any change in the methods of acquiring food. But there is one element in the economic structure of Murngin civilization that must have made this adaptation somewhat difficult, since the sexual division of labor allots the task of gathering mollusk and other seashore foods to the women. Men only gather these articles of diet for their own use when they have no women with them and there is nothing else to eat. It is very likely that if the natives could not have speared fish or harpooned dugong or turtle while looking for trepang beds, the Malays would have found the industry unprofitable, if not impossible.

The Malay brought the tamarind fruit with him. The seeds that were thrown away sprouted, and now the lands where he voyaged are known by their growth of the tamarind tree. Many of these trees are very large. The circles of trees which surround the spot where once a huge tamarind tree had grown show that they are secondary growths and do not represent the earliest period of the Malay contact. No one knows how long the Malay has been making his voyages to Australia. The writer attempted to find

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 QE17 Murngin QE17

and cut it up in the same manner as do the aborigines of today. The fishermen, the canoe and the pieces of turtle meat are *now* natural features at Jalbua.

In the upper right of the painting, Pl. 96B, *Minjapa* and *Wuluwil* are spearing the turtle. They are shown again seated on either side of a rock, a black circle. Below them are two casuarina trees, Pl. 91A,[98] which grow near the totemic place. The metamorphosed bodies of the two men, *Minjapa* and *Wuluwil*, now the turtle-rock[99] Ai-aika (Pl. 97A), are indicated at *a*, on the outer edge. There is a similar design immediately beneath the turtle. A semi-circular design near the tail of the turtle is the metamorphosed canoe, now a low red rock in the shallow water (Pl. 97C, on the left). The oval *b*, on the lower edge of the painting, is the carapace of the turtle (Pl. 97B). In the lower right are two pieces of flesh, *baiwa*, from the inside of the turtle's front flippers, and above is the club, *barlait*, with which the hunters killed the turtle. Above the carapace are two pieces of meat (more or less triangular figures) from the chest, called *tritiri*. The fat from the creature is indicated by a barred oval on the extreme upper left. The turtle-spear and spear-thrower are on the right-hand edge at *c*. Immediately to the left of them are two more pieces of meat from the inside of the front flipper.

The fishermen, the canoe, and the parts of the dismembered turtle have all been transformed into natural features on the sea-shore at Jalbua. The turtle-rock, Ai-aika (Pl. 97A) is the metamorphosed bodies of the turtle fishermen, *Minjapa* and *Wuluwil*. The canoe is a small low rock on the extreme left (Pl. 97C), the carapace (Pl. 97B) and parts of the dismembered turtle (Pl. 97D) large eroded boulders on the coast.

There is hardly a rock or a tree in this locality that is not linked, in one way or another, with either *Tjunbuneal*, the thunder-man, *Murunna*, the fisherman, or *Minjapa* and *Wuluwil*, the turtle-fishers.

Tjuna-tjuna, Wurururnga and the Bukalatji

Two brothers, *Tjuna-tjuna*[1] and *Wurururnga*, were the first people to live on Dambalia (Bremer Island). They were paddling to the mainland in their bark canoe on one occasion when they noticed smoke among the trees and, on sneaking ashore, saw a *Bukalatji* man, *Djunmundia*, asleep by the fire. He was wearing, around his neck, a particularly large carrying-bag.

The brothers said to each other, "This is the man who killed our father last year. We now have our chance to pay him back."[2]

98. The same trees as those mentioned in the *Tjunbuneal* myth.

99. The aborigines throw stones on the top of this rock in order to ensure success in catching turtles.

1. In the myth associated with the two carved heads, Pl. 139D, *V. Tjuna-tjuna* is called *Banaramin*.

2. Blood feuds are common in Arnhem Land and the cause of most of the killings. They can, however, be ended at a ceremonial peace-making fight, the *mabaraba*. See Warner (1937), p. 174, also the myth of crocodile and stingray and the origin of the first *mabaraba*, Pl. 122D.

[text continues on p. 305]

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 Oll7 Murngin Oll7

that they can help the spirits of the newly dead on their journey to Nalkuma, *Wala-wala* giving them the bean of the *menin* tree,[90] a passport into the *jiritja* heaven, and *Kultana* assisting to paddle them across the sea to their future home.[91]

The Mokoi and the Turtle Hunt

Plate 110E is the story of a turtle hunt by some of the *Mokoi* who had paddled in a wooden canoe from Nalkuma to Cape Arnhem, and the incidents connected with the hunt.

The three *Mokoi* paddled through rough water (four cross-hatched rectangles, *a*, on left of right-hand panel) to reach a group of rocks (squares with diagonal lines at *b*) so that they could spear the turtles living among those rocks. On their way the spirit-men saw a devil-ray, *b* (*Dasmonata alfredi*).[92] The large gills are shown as slits, and the fat within the body as a crescent. In the left panel are dugongs, *merinjunga*, feeding on the submarine grass, *gumata*. The fish are *tinimbu*, queen fish, and squares with diagonal lines, rocks in the sea frequented by the turtles, upper edge.

The Mokoi and the Dugong, Merinjunga

Two mythical dugongs, *merinjunga* (*Dugong australis*), which once lived in the sea at Cape Arnhem were continuously being pursued by the *Mokoi* who came from the *jiritja* heaven, Nalkuma. The *Mokoi*, however, were not always successful because, just as they were about to spear the creatures, a storm would develop and allow the dugongs to escape.[93] Later the canoe was transformed into a large rock on the sea coast between Cape Arnhem and Port Bradshaw, and the dugongs into a rock in the water near by. The place of the stingray, which also appears in the painting, is a hole in the ground. When travelling in their canoes the aborigines will not go near the totemic place of the dugong, for if they did the dugongs would send up so much smoke and fire that they would be destroyed.

On the land, near this totemic place, is a paper-bark tree, once a dugong, which resembles that creature in appearance, and near by is a termite mound also a transformed dugong. When the aborigines wish to increase the supply of dugongs at a particular locality they take a branch from the dugong tree and a piece of earth from the termite mound and throw them both into the fire. When the wood is burnt to ash the men take the heated termite earth from the fire, pound it into dust, mix it with the wood ash and throw the mixture into the sea where the dugongs feed. This dust from the totemic tree and the termite mound will create many dugongs in that locality.[94]

90. Pl. 108C. 91. Myth, p. 331.

92. This huge, cumbersome but harmless sea-creature sometimes reaches a length of fifteen feet and a weight of a ton.

93. Dugongs can only be captured on windless days when the sea is calm.

94. This increase ritual is not unlike that carried out at the increase centre for parrot-fish at Winchelsea Island, p. 84.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OI17 Murngin OI17

A Hunting Scene

224 *532 This bark painting, Pl. 114C,[15] illustrates the experiences of an aboriginal who went out to spear kangaroos near Biluitja, a place about four miles west of Yirrkalla. In the upper right-hand are the lines of paired footprints of men and kangaroos. Whilst chasing the kangaroos, the hunter saw an emu, *kadbarait*, standing in the grass (cross-hatching), eating the blossoms from a low shrub, called *wari*, and further along, a fresh-water goanna, *bije* (upper left), running through the grass (cross-hatching).

Creatures at Bartalumba, Groote Eylandt

*532 Plate 114D[16] pictures the country adjacent to the Bartalumba headland, western Groote Eylandt.

Reading from the bottom, the anvil-like figure in the middle of panel *a* is a large cloud over the Bartalumba hills; bottom right is a diagonal line of birds, and above them at *b*, small clouds and rain. On the lower left edge at *c* are seven casuarina trees, with three pigeons above them. Over the central transverse cross-hatched panel, *d*, is another line of birds. The main anvil-shaped design at *e*, in the upper panel, is a cumulus cloud with rain (cross-hatching) falling from its lower edge. There are four cycad palms at *f*, in the upper left, with three pigeons roosting in the branches and three grasshoppers in flight. In the upper right, *g* is another group of cycad palms, and below them at *h*, two women, *Nabililanga* and *Wurati-laku*,[17] with their carrying-baskets (rectangles) and digging sticks beside them.

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Kangaroos, Emus and Goannas

136 *532 There is no mythological story associated with the two bark paintings, Pl. 115A, D. They depict kangaroos, emus and goannas in every-day surroundings.

In the upper panel, Pl. 115A, is a kangaroo lying in the shade of a tree, after it had eaten a meal from the leaves of a yam, depicted as torpedo-shaped designs to the right of the creature. At *a* and *b* are two similar plants. The cross-hatched vertical band between them indicates a well-worn track made by other kangaroos. The kangaroo footmarks to the left are newly made.

Plate 115D shows a number of creatures which live round a lagoon called Doraka, situated several miles west of our base camp at Yirrkalla. Doraka lagoon is the oval in the centre, and above is a number of male and female emus and their tracks. In the lower left are two red kangaroos, the paired tracks of one of them being shown in the extreme lower left. On the lower right are four fresh-water goannas, *bije*.

The Whale, Dianmeri

*1773 ●225 This myth tells about three aboriginal fishermen, a whale and the death of one of the fishermen.[18]

15. Interpretation by F. D. McCarthy.
16. Interpretation by F. D. McCarthy.
17. See carved figure of *Wurati-laku*, Pl. 135C, D; myth, p. 436.
18. These men were distant relatives of *Mawulan*, the artist who produced this bark painting.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OI17 Murngin OI17

*773 ●225 The three aborigines, having between them made a new rope and spear, set out in a canoe to capture a turtle. They speared one, and hauled it to the surface, but were unable to pull the turtle close enough to the canoe to kill it. One of the aborigines had just jumped overboard to push the turtle within reach of his companions, when two large whales surfaced, one on either side of the canoe, almost swamping it. The men in the canoe, fearful of what might happen to [501] their companion, told him to swim under the canoe, and enter it over the stern, the usual way. But when he did so he dived into the mouth of one of the whales. As the creature surfaced, the aborigines saw the legs and buttocks of their companion protruding from its mouth.

Although the first reaction of the two fishermen was to paddle from the scene of the tragedy, they soon came back in the hope that they could retrieve the body. But they did not and had to return to camp to tell the sad news. Next morning, however, two boys, when looking for turtle eggs, found the body cast up on the beach.

136 The bark painting, Pl. 115C, represents what is probably the hump-backed whale, which is known to frequent the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. The *532 aborigines described this whale, which they called *dianmeri*, as a large fish, considerably longer than a canoe, which floats on the surface of the sea, a characteristic of the hump-backed whale. The curving lines on either side of the head represent the water parting as the creature swims along the surface, and the ovals down the central part of the body, the light-coloured skin markings of [825] this whale. According to my informants the whale, *dianmeri*, has two mouths in its tail, shown as ovals, with which it takes hold of a canoe to capsize it.

The Night-bird, Kurawak, and the Opossum, Marungo at Cape Shield

*773 During mythical times the night-bird, *kurawak* (unidentified) lived by himself at Milingimbi. One night, feeling lonely, he flew to the top of the tree in which he lived and called out to an opossum, *marungo*, whose home was in a hollow tree at Djerakoi, Cape Shield, near Blue Mud Bay, to come over and talk to him. But the opossum did not even reply. *Kurawak* then flew to the Wessel Islands, then to Arnhem Bay and then to Cape Arnhem, at each place asking the opossum to pay him a visit, but the opossum made no sign of even having heard the night-bird. Finally *kurawak* flew to the hollow tree at Cape Shield, the home of the opossum, and settling on the upper branches, again repeated his request. As soon as it was dark, the opossum left his nesting hollow and, climbing to the top of the tree, talked with *kurawak* the whole night long. When, however, the first light of dawn came in the sky, the opossum descended the tree and went to sleep in a hollow limb. From that time until now, the night-bird, *kurawak*, calls at night, the only time that the opossum will leave his home in the hollow tree and talk to him.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

Of aboriginal feet the least said the better; for they definitely give the lie to the theory that protective footwear spoils natural shapeliness. Toes are broken, knobbed, and widely spaced: this is particularly true of the first and second toes, by which they easily grasp and lift spears and large sticks or grip the rigging in climbing to the masthead of a lugger. Hands, however, are beautifully shaped, with long tapering fingers, and compare more favourably with an average European hand.

Finally, aboriginal skin is not black, as is popularly supposed, but is in varying shades of velvety brown, for there are blondes and brunettes in the Arnhem Land bush.

Daily life has not changed in a thousand decades, and still involves hunting with stone and wooden spears and stone axes for everything the nomad eats. Their camp grounds are well known, and are usually found on sandy slopes or beaches, reasonably close to water but as far as possible from the swamps that usually swarm with mosquitoes and sand-flies. A typical instance is 'Damballia' or Breamer Island, favoured for turtle hunting and named after its totemic waterhole. Having heard a lot about it, I set out to see it with some boys in a canoe. I took provisions and water for myself and flour for the boys, but they declined my offer of a drum for water, remarking that the well on the island would supply their needs and mine too.

With a favourable wind and tide we landed on the island at sunrise, and whilst my billy boiled, the boys went off to the well for water. As I was finishing my breakfast I noticed an overpowering smell, and found that it came from the well-water they were using to mix their damper. Even then they steadfastly maintained that it was up to standard, and politely declined some of mine. I found the well to be an open waterhole, completely covered by pandanus palms in which thousands of small doves and other birds were roosting. Nearby were several broken-down huts, and dozens

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224 I found their methods of kangaroo hunting to be the most interesting of all, and I know the men would agree with this estimate. Kangaroos are comparatively easy prey during the wet season, when long grass covers the hillsides. A hunter [302] often smears white clay over his head, for clay is an effective camouflage, and a man so daubed is scarcely distinguishable from burnt-off tree stumps with their occasional unburnt patches of white. The big hunt is carefully planned, and there are intricate methods for driving, ambushing, and trapping kangaroos when the rains are over and the herbage is dry. Wide valleys or plains are selected for the hunt, and [372] a patch is burnt out in the centre. Meanwhile, three or four men run a wide circle of fire around the burnt-out area, and hunters with spears and firesticks light many fires inside the outer wall of smoke and gradually close in toward the centre, leaving behind them a wall of roaring flames and blinding smoke which terrifies and drives all the small animals, reptiles, and kangaroos into the central death-trap where they are speared.

● 225 Most Arnhem Land Yulengor hunt for sea-food both on shore and from canoes. Metal has been filtering into the [179] country for two centuries, and this has made hunting easier. [411] Once they fished with pronged hardwood spears and made wooden harpoons for the soft-skinned green turtle, dugong, [325] and porpoise, but they now grind metal harpoons that are able to pierce even the hard carapace of the shell-back turtle. For turtle hunting, a harpoon is tied to bush rope and [411] fitted into the end of a long spear haft, and when a turtle is sighted on the surface the canoe is paddled quietly toward it with a man standing in the bow ready for the strike.

Dugong are hunted at night, and canoes skim around the sea-grass feeding-grounds till an animal is sighted and harpooned. The flesh resembles pork, and the animals sometimes measure up to twelve feet in length and weigh half a 136 ton. A dugong suckles her calf while clasping it to her with